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Could your sweet tooth be a warning sign that you're ill?

By LOUISE ATKINSON

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Despite the endless health campaigns to encourage us to cut back, sugar still makes up a third of our calorie intake.

This is deeply worrying, say experts, who are increasingly concerned that our bodies were not designed to take such a sugar overload, and fear it is contributing to many modern ills, including diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

The problem is that sugar is highly addictive, as study after study has shown. Just last week researchers at Yale University revealed that dramatic falls in blood sugar, which occur after eating 'bad' carbohydrates such as sweets and biscuits, affect the part of the brain controlling impulse.



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Sugar addiction is the 'canary in the coal mine' - often pointing to an undiagnosed problem such as failing adrenal glands, says Dr Jacob Teitelbaum

This leads to a loss of self control and a subsequent craving for more unhealthy, high-calorie foods.

The researchers said this could help explain the rising global obesity epidemic.

Meanwhile, Robert Lustig, a leading U.S. obesity expert, has gone further — he believes sugar is an addictive toxin and should be regulated in the same way as cigarettes.

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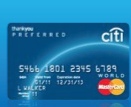
- [The cancer risk in your 'healthy' glass of fruit juice which has so much sugar it could bring on tumours](#)

But as well as causing health problems, could an addiction to sugar be a sign of an underlying condition you may not know about?

That's the suggestion being made by Dr Jacob Teitelbaum in his book, *Beat Sugar Addiction Now!*

He describes sugar addiction as the 'canary in the coal mine', saying it

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often points to an undiagnosed problem such as failing adrenal glands (which sit above the kidneys and pump out hormones) or even too much 'bad' bacteria in the gut.

Dr Teitelbaum has identified four types of sugar addiction. He says they are triggered by different causes, from hormonal changes to infections.

According to the type that best describes you, he suggests a specific action plan to tackle the problem.

Here are the four types — so which one is most like you?

THYROID FAILURE

DOES THIS SOUND LIKE YOU? You work more than 40 hours a week and feel tired much of the time. A coffee every morning is vital to get you going and you crave sweets or caffeine through the day (you'll also have a non-diet fizzy drink most days).

You are plagued with aches and pains and have frequent headaches. You're also gaining weight and have trouble losing it.

THE PROBLEM: Because you're super busy, with little time for proper meals, you rely on fast food, sugary drinks and snacks to provide a boost.

It's not unusual for this type of sugar addict to have an underactive thyroid gland, which leads to fatigue.

Tension in your muscles — which are also not getting the energy they need to function — makes you prone to headaches.

THE SOLUTION: Caffeine can aggravate sugar addiction (when you come down from an energy 'high', you often reach for sugar).

Withdraw gradually by halving coffee consumption each week, until you are on one cup a day, then switch to tea and finally caffeine-free tea.

Drink more water to help flush your system. Ban processed food and white flour, and switch to diet drinks and whole foods such as brown bread, rice, pasta and fibre, which take longer for the body to process, keeping blood sugar levels stable and keeping you off the sugar roller coaster.

Getting more sleep optimises energy levels, reduces appetite and slashes sugar cravings. When you are tired, you are more likely to crave sugar to generate energy artificially.

YEAST INVASION

DOES THIS SOUND LIKE YOU? It's impossible for you to get through the day without bread or sugar.

You've had a fungal infection, such as thrush or athlete's foot, that has been difficult to treat — you might also have symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome (such as wind, bloating, diarrhoea and/or constipation).

At some point you've been on antibiotics long term (more than a month) for conditions such as acne, or taken them more than three times in 12 months.

You frequently pop antacids or may have been prescribed steroids (such as Prednisone) for more than a month.

THE PROBLEM: It could be a yeast/candida overgrowth.

If you've had more than your fair share of antibiotics or antacids, there's a strong chance they've triggered an overgrowth of bad bacteria.

Antibiotics kill off 'good' bacteria (which help keep bad bacteria in check), while antacids neutralise the stomach acid that normally tackles bad bacteria. Dr Teitelbaum claims the resulting yeast over-population feeds on sugar. It then triggers cravings for sugar and bread because the body can quickly convert these to glucose.

Eating sugar makes the yeast multiply, so intensifying cravings and creating a vicious circle.

Steroids and stress, which increase your body's secretion of the hormone cortisol, can suppress your immune system, allowing yeast to run wild, making sugar cravings constant.

THE SOLUTION: You need to cut back on all forms of sugar, as well as caffeine. and switch to a low GI wholefood diet.

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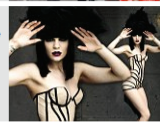
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This will be easier if you work at building up your healthy levels of beneficial bacteria with a probiotic supplement or yoghurt (take two twice a day for five months).

Restoring the balance of bacteria can take up to five months, but with time sugar should become easier to resist.

ADRENALINE OVERLOAD

DOES THIS SOUND LIKE YOU? You're irritable when you're hungry; you also often feel stressed. Sometimes you feel dizzy when you stand up. As well as suffering from recurrent sore throats and swollen glands, you may often be thirsty and have to urinate frequently.

THE PROBLEM: You could be suffering from adrenal 'overload'. The job of our adrenal glands is to pump out the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol when we're under pressure.

But overtaxed by the constant stresses of modern life, these glands can become sluggish, causing us to reach for sugar for energy. But the effect will be short-lived — any sugar-induced high will be swiftly followed by a 'low' which can leave you anxious and jittery.

THE SOLUTION: Graze on small, high-protein meals throughout the day (snack on nuts, cheese or eggs). This should keep energy levels on an even keel, making it easier to cut back on sugar. Try to reduce stress levels.

MENOPAUSE OR PMT

DOES THIS SOUND LIKE YOU?

You're a woman aged 38 or over. You suffer from low mood and reduced sex drive — your periods have been getting irregular or changing (and the week before it starts you experience insomnia, headaches, fatigue and hot flushes).

THE PROBLEM: You may be experiencing the menopause, perimenopause (the lead-up to the menopause) or pre-menstrual tension.

As levels of the hormones oestrogen and progesterone drop, women become more prone to insulin resistance, where the body's cells don't respond as well to insulin.

This can cause sugar cravings to soar, leaving you tired, irritable and miserable when you do eat sugar.

As hormone levels change, the body attempts to raise levels of the feel-good hormone serotonin, and since sugar triggers a serotonin release, this can cause you to crave sweet things.

THE SOLUTION: Cut down on sugar as much as possible, but if you suffer from premenstrual tension, try taking vitamin B6 (200mg a day), too.

This helps ease the deficiency of the 'feel good' hormone prostaglandin E1 (when this hormone is low, irritability and sugar cravings can result).

If mood swings are a problem, it could be because excess sugar is blocking your ability to turn a substance called GLA (gamma linoleic acid) into the DGLA (dihomo-gamma-linoleic acid) needed to produce prostaglandins that improve mood.

If you cut out sugar, you will be allowing your body to make prostaglandin more effectively.

Beat Sugar Addiction Now! by Dr Jacob Teitelbaum (Fairwinds Press, £10.99).



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As levels of the hormones oestrogen and progesterone drop, women become more prone to insulin resistance

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